

# PEOPLE & THINGS

**T**HE news that the summer of 1958 will see a gigantic World's Fair in Brussels is a matter of rejoicing to those who, like myself, take delight in international exhibitions and regard them as desirable survivals from the nineteenth century — a generous epoch, after all, and one from which they retain the sense of an expanding society and a delight in miscellaneous information.

But they need somebody with a near-genius for organisation; and I was therefore the more interested, when speaking to Baron Moens de Fernig, the Commissioner-General for the Brussels Fair, to find that he had the manner, not of somebody living through a seven-year nightmare, but of a man enjoying comfortable retirement. He spoke of his short visit to London in tones that suggested that friendly intercourse and the appraisal of eighteenth-century painting have been its main objects; only intermittently did he admit to having called on, among others, Sir Anthony Eden, Lord Reading, Mr. Thorneycroft, and Sir Kenneth Clark; and to having discussed with them, and with several leaders of industry, the nature of Britain's contribution to the Fair.

## Administrator Extraordinary

**T**HERE is to be nothing haphazard about the Brussels Fair, which is in essentials a humanist exhibition. Its object, in the organisers' own words, is to demonstrate "the human values that lie behind man's technical achievements." Man is to be shown, in fact, as "inventor, artist, technician, and consumer" on a world-wide scale.

To this task Baron de Fernig brings a nimble and versatile intelligence which found its ideal outlet during the period after the war when he was a member of M. Spaak's Cabinet and became so great an authority on administrative decontrol that he has since been in demand throughout Europe as a consultant on the removal of war-time controls.

Many of us, I fancy, will look forward to landing at the specially built Brussels heliport during the summer of 1958. I wonder, too, if the Fair will leave behind it one of those mammoth souvenirs (the Eiffel Tower and the Crystal Palace are examples that leap to mind) which earlier exhibitions of this sort have left behind them?

## A Hero of Llanrhaidr

**T**HERE will be, I hear, a great gathering of Welshmen at St. Martin-in-the-Fields on the evening of Thursday next, when a commemorative service is to be held for Bishop William Morgan. It was Bishop Morgan who translated the Bible into Welsh in the 1870s and 80s and saw the book through the press while the Spanish Armada was heading for our shores. A copy of the first printing has, I hear, been lent for the occasion by the Dean and Chapter of Westminster Abbey; and the lessons will be read from it.

Bishop Morgan's persistence in his enormous task has long commanded my admiration—as has the worldly wisdom which persuaded him, when making the powerful plea for the Welsh language which irradiates the Dedication to Queen Elizabeth I, to modulate

## By ATTICUS

into a more accessible tongue. No such half-measures will be taken next Thursday evening, however; and the celebrants, who are to include the Home Secretary and Minister for Welsh Affairs, will have to tackle an Order of Service of which every word is in Welsh.

## Plain Speaking

**T**HIS is an age, as the Prime Minister reminded us on Tuesday, in which "force and candour" in portraiture are prized above suavity and polite evasion.

I was reminded of his remark when Mr. Arthur Jeffress showed me Aldo Pagliacci's portrait of Mr. W. H. Auden, which is to be on show in Mr. Jeffress's new gallery this week. Mr. Auden, though in



W. H. Auden, by Aldo Pagliacci

other respects the very pattern of modernity, has reverted to the traditional fondness of English-speaking poets for Italian life. Like Byron, Shelley and Browning, he has Mediterranean sympathies; and on the island of Ischia, where he spends several months of each year, Signor Pagliacci is his neighbour.

Pagliacci is a visionary artist, whose paintings are rarely complete without some spectacular image of catastrophe; and one cannot say that he has caught the explosive geniality which is one of Mr. Auden's most engaging characteristics. But it is a powerful piece of painting, with a symbolic background of mountains, minarets, and unidentified conflagrations.

What I missed in it was the real background to Mr. Auden's life in Ischia: the out-of-the-way house in a side-street, with its high-domed ceilings and purple-shadowed courtyard, and the unaffected simplicity of the interior—where, in place of the plaster cherubs and painted furniture which bedizen other expatriates' villas, the visitor will find an abundance of deck-chairs and be pressed to take luncheon off a large wooden box.

## A Temple in Danger

**I** HEAR that on Saturday next the Leander Club is to break with tradition and give, for the first time, a cocktail party at Henley-on-Thames.

I hope that one of the subjects of conversation on this genial occasion will be the condition of Temple Island. This minor but

delectable feature of the Henley regatta-course is falling into decay; and with it is endangered not only the unblemished beauty of the course itself (surely one of the most memorable stretches of country in Europe) but also a valuable example of small-scale architectural style.

The temple itself was designed by James Wyatt, and the "Etruscan" decorations are attributed to Pietro Borghis, who is known to have worked for the Adam brothers. The building has affinities, in its miniature way, with Osterley, Heveningham and other great English houses; and it has a sociable history of fishing- and supper-parties. (As late as 1950 the caretaker used to go shopping by skiff.) That Temple Island should be preserved from further dilapidation is, I feel, one of those rare causes in which the aesthete and the rowing-man can pull together in amity.

## Spellbinder

**D**R. WILHELM FURTWÄNGLER, who died last Tuesday, had never commanded in this country the unquestioning adulation which greeted his every appearance in Germany, Austria, Italy and Switzerland. There was in his character something demonic and unyielding which chilled his English critics; and there was also an appearance of tyranny and a high German seriousness which we had good reason to dislike. When he stood before the orchestra and swayed like a lamp-post in a hurricane there were many who were moved—but many also who preferred a mellow, more easy-going approach.

Where Furtwängler was incomparable was in the brooding intensity of his interpretations. In the opera-house, in particular, his presence cast a sombre spell upon the whole audience, the life-blood of the music flowed thick and slow, and the experience took on the quality of an initiation. Whether it was "right" or "wrong"—whether, for instance, Wagner meant the prelude to Act III of "Tristan" to hang in the air like smoke above a doomed city—could be argued indefinitely; what matters is that, in his kind, it was unique.

## Personal Hassocks

**F**EW churches, I imagine, command such an intense local loyalty as Chelsea Old Church. Certainly I never, during the last war, heard any building so deeply and so generally mourned by those who lived near it.

One touching instance of this is the scholarly passion with which a special committee of embroiderers and weavers is devoting itself to the reconstitution of the church's stock of hassocks. Some 200 hassocks are now ready—each bearing the name of one of those former inhabitants of Chelsea who are commemorated on the salvaged statues and tombstones; and not the name only, but an appropriate emblem or design. John Donne, Sir Thomas More, and Sir Hans Sloane are only a few of those already incorporated into the distinguished company.

"Hassock and cassock, paraffin and pew"—Mr. John Betjeman's famous line will have, I feel, a special significance for future visitors to Chelsea Old Church.